

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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Perseverance precedes success, but the question is, by how far?



IT HAD BEEN my misfortune to arrest the mayor's son for drunken driving.

Captain Milliken saw me alone in his office. He smiled tightly. "Henry, why don't you resign?"

"No," I said firmly.

"Why don't I fire you?"

"Because we both know that firings are reviewed by the Police



Board and it is composed of civilians who might create a stink."

He winced at the word 'civilians'. "Why did you do it?" he demanded again. "You were off-duty. Besides, you're in Homicide."

"A policeman is *never* off-duty."

"Didn't he *tell* you he was the mayor's son?"

"Yes, but anybody could claim that."

"Didn't you *look* at his driver's license?"

"Of course. However, Johnson is such a common name . . ."

It had been my day off and I had been returning from the main library downtown when I noticed the car in front of me weaving considerably from side to side. I had blown my horn and pulled cautiously alongside, waving my wallet and its badge. The driver had been still sufficiently in possession of his senses to pull to the curb.

Upon further investigation, I quickly determined that he was in no condition to walk. As a matter of fact, he fell asleep when I pocketed

his car keys and went to the nearest public phone to summon a patrol wagon.

Milliken got to his feet. "Come with me, Henry."

I followed him out into the corridor. We walked side by side for some time and then stopped before a door marked *Records Division*. We entered.

Some twenty civilian clerks were busy at work in the large room.

"Are you transferring me?" I asked.

Milliken continued walking.

We passed through the room to a blank door at the farther end of the department. Milliken unlocked it and we went in.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Your new assignment," Milliken said. He grandly indicated the wooden filing cabinets. "Here we have the case records of murder, robbery, rape, arson, breaking and entering, litterbugging, and whatever—none of which have ever been solved." He smiled, revealing remarkably sharp teeth. "Henry, it is now your job to review these cases to see if something can finally be done for the triumph of justice."

The word 'finally' caught my attention. "The filing cabinets look awfully dusty."

Milliken revealed his teeth again. "And they should be. Every case in this room is at least twenty-five

by Jack
Ritchie

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK

years old. Some of them even go back to the founding of the police department. I believe that was in 1842."

I blinked. "You mean I'm supposed to review cases that are more than twenty-five years dead?"

"Not dead, Henry. Just resting. And I expect you to wake them up." His smile increased. "No hurry, Henry. You've got *all* the time in the world." He dropped the key into my palm. "Don't forget to turn off the lights and lock up when you leave. And *do* have fun."

He disappeared the way we had come.

I sighed and proceeded to examine the room. It was windowless. I wandered through the aisles of filing cabinets and found a small island of space which contained a battered flattop desk and a swivel chair.

Ah, evidently someone had once lived here.

I turned on the drop light above the desk and the area warmed up a bit. I returned to the filing cabinets and began examining labels. Yes, Milliken had been right. Almost every crime conceivable—and unsolved—resided here, and all of them were at least twenty-five years old.

I found the section devoted to homicides and opened one of the filing cabinet drawers at random. I

pulled out a thick cardboard container, went back to the desk and began reading the contents.

The murder had taken place at six-forty on the first Friday of a rather warm day in November 1941.

It was at that time—give or take a minute—that the immediate neighbors of Mrs. Irene Brannon had heard her scream. They had rushed to their windows and one of them, a Mrs. Wilson, claimed to have seen a dark figure rush out of the back of the Brannon house. She had been unable to describe it further, the night being almost moonless and the sun having set officially at 4:46 p.m.

Mrs. Wilson had immediately phoned the police.

When they arrived, they found Mrs. Brannon dead on the floor of her kitchen. She had been stabbed three times and the murder weapon was missing.

On the floor beside her body, the police found a diamond bracelet which the department experts estimated to be worth approximately ten thousand dollars.

The police had taken the necessary photographs and measurements and removed the body to the morgue for the mandatory autopsy.

Two detectives—one of them a Sergeant Dunlap—remained at the Brannon home until approximately

eleven o'clock, at which time Mrs. Brannon's husband, Dennis, returned home.

They informed him of what had happened and he seemed to be properly shaken by the news. Upon questioning, Dennis Brannon denied having any part in the murder. He claimed he had spent the entire evening—from six to approximately ten-thirty—at the home of his twin brother Albert.

Brannon had been taken to the station for further questioning, but he continued to deny any knowledge concerning his wife's death.

His brother, Albert, also brought to the station, backed up Brannon's statements completely.

The police had released Dennis Brannon at five-thirty in the morning and had assigned someone to follow him when he left.

Brannon had gone directly to the six o'clock Mass at St. John's Cathedral. It appeared that he attended Mass every morning, come rain, shine, or murder.

I read on.

The cardboard container held everything—the official forms, some of them now obsolete, the records of the interviews, the questionings. There were the descriptions, the statements, the biographies. It was all here—everything the police could unearth—but still the crime remained unsolved.

When I finished my reading, I glanced at my watch. More than two hours had passed by. I turned back to the papers spread out on the desk. Yes, I could almost see and hear Dunlap interviewing the suspects, the witnesses.

I leaned back thoughtfully and promptly fell over. Now I realized why this particular swivel chair had been consigned to the scrap heap. I got off the floor, put the chair back together, and gingerly sat down again.

Where was I? Oh, yes. Seeing Sergeant Dunlap interrogating people; Mrs. Wilson, for instance.

Mrs. Wilson was sharp-eyed and eager. "I really don't know *too* much about the Brannons. They moved into the neighborhood only six months ago."

"Tell us what you can."

"Well, I'll say one good thing for her. She always did her wash on Mondays. Not like *some* people in this neighborhood. You know, Tuesdays, or Wednesdays, or whenever. And her clothesline was always orderly."

"Orderly?"

"Yes. All the pillow cases hung together. Socks with socks, and all the shirts on one line. Some people in this neighborhood put up their laundry just helter-skelter. All mixed up, you know."

"Yes. Well, you heard Mrs. Brannon scream at six-forty, and you went immediately to the window?"

"That's right. There wasn't much light, but I could just make out this figure running across the back lawn and into the alley."

"Mr. Brannon?"

"I really couldn't *swear* to that. Just a figure. It could have been anybody."

"The Brannons were quiet neighbors? No loud arguments, for instance?"

"Very quiet neighbors. Almost ideal, you'd think. Except for the vodka bottles."

"Vodka bottles?"

"Yes. Every other day or so, Mrs. Brannon used to *sneak* out of the back door of her house with an empty bottle and she'd push it *under* the other trash in the ash box. I just *happened* to be outside when the trash men came—they collect only once in two weeks now, you know. Garbage once a week, but trash only every second week—and I *noticed* that all of the bottles were vodka bottles. Eight or nine bottles every two weeks."

"The Brannons drank?"

"Well . . . I don't think that he drank at all. I can usually *tell* just by looking at a person." She held a small, tight smile. "Don't people drink vodka because it has no *smell*? I mean she could drink and

hide those bottles and he'd never *know*, would he?"

"Did the Brannons have many friends? Visitors?"

"Not many visitors. But I do think that *she* had a *special* friend."

"Someone who visited her frequently?"

"Not exactly visited. It was sort of halfway."

"Halfway?"

The light in her eyes became brighter. "Well . . . my sister lives just four blocks away from here—around the corner and straight on—and I do go there fairly often. Four or five times a week, I'd say. This one afternoon about eight weeks ago, Maggie and I were having tea at the livingroom window when I noticed Mrs. Brannon walking up the street. She stopped at the corner and I thought she might be waiting for the bus. But several of them passed by, and she still stood there."

"Yes?"

"Well, I said to myself, that's odd. So we just watched, Maggie and me, and after about five minutes more, this great big car with a *man* driving pulled up and Mrs. Brannon got into it." Mrs. Wilson paused for a moment. "That was on a Wednesday, and on *Friday*, Maggie and I happened to be sitting there again when the same thing went on—Mrs. Brannon waiting

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there and getting into the same big car. And so we . . . *Maggie* . . . decided to keep a weather eye out at two o'clock in the afternoons, and what do you know, Mrs. Brannon would get picked up by that car at least two or three times a week."

"Could you describe the car?"

"I really don't know that much about automobiles, except that it looked expensive. And I couldn't describe the man either. He never got out of the car. *However* . . ."

"Yes?"

Slight color came to Mrs. Wilson's cheekbones. "My *sister* did happen to copy the license number of the car. I mean, it was all a little *suspicious*, you know, and I . . . *she* . . . thought that it wouldn't do any *harm* to take it down, just in case *something* might come up . . ."

Yes, she had given Sergeant Dunlap the license number of the car, and the State Motor Vehicle Department had come up with the name of Charles Colling, 2481 N. Simmon Avenue.

Colling proved to be in his late forties and the senior vice-president of our largest department store. Also he was married and had two children in college.

Colling had been wary. "What can I do for you, Sergeant?"

"Do you know a Mrs. Irene Brannon?"

Colling frowned thoughtfully. "Brannon? Brannon? No, I'm afraid I don't know anybody by that name."

"Would this photograph help you to refresh your memory?"

He had glanced at it and paled slightly.

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"I said I don't know anybody named Brannon."

"You were seen with her on a number of occasions—by reliable witnesses who took the trouble to jot down your license plate number."

Colling licked his lips. "What is this all about?"

"Mrs. Brannon was murdered last night."

Colling lost more color. "And you think that I had something to do with the killing?"

"Where were you at approximately six-forty last night?"

"Is that the time she was murdered?"

"Please answer the question."

Colling thought for a moment and then almost smiled. "At six-forty last night I was at the State Businessmen's Association banquet in Park Falls. That's over thirty miles from here."

"Do you have anyone who could verify that?"

"Of course. Nearly a hundred

people. As a matter of fact, I was the principal speaker at the banquet. I arrived early, at six, for the pre-dinner drinks. The dinner itself was served at seven, and I gave my speech at seven-thirty."

"What was your relationship with Mrs. Brannon?"

Colling cleared his throat. "We were just friends."

"Friends enough so that you found it necessary to meet secretly? Friends enough to buy her a ten thousand dollar bracelet? We are in the process of tracing it now, Mr. Colling. It shouldn't be too difficult, but could you save us time?"

Colling looked away. "All right. I bought it for her."

"How did you happen to get acquainted with Mrs. Brannon?"

"Just one of those things. Met her at a bar and one thing led to another." He smiled faintly. "Her husband didn't understand her."

"Did you ever make her any promises?"

"Promises?"

"A man doesn't casually give a woman a ten thousand dollar bracelet, does he? Did you ever make her feel that the affair was more than just an affair? That perhaps it would lead to marriage?"

"No," Colling said firmly. "Absolutely not." Then he hedged. "Possibly she might have *misunderstood*, but never, *never* did I promise her

anything like that." He took a breath. "Sergeant, is there any need to drag my name into this? I mean, I'm a married man with two children. It would cause nothing but harm if my *friendship* with Mrs. Brannon came to light. After all, I had nothing to do with her murder."

"You could have provided the motive."

Colling paled again.

Again I found myself on the floor. I got up, put the chair together, and turned back to another group of papers.

Dennis and Albert were twins; not identical twins, but just your ordinary run-of-the-mill twins. Their immediate friends had little or no difficulty in telling them apart.

Their parents had, at the very beginning, determined that each of the twins would be allowed to develop a personality of his own. While they advanced in schooling at the same rate—receiving similar, though not identical grades—they were seldom ever assigned to the same classroom. They were never dressed alike, each having his own wardrobe.

Probably as a consequence of this, as adults, they diverged to some degree, though still maintaining a warm personal relationship. Dennis turned to Catholicism, his father's faith, and Albert be-

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came a Quaker, his mother's per-
suation. In the field of vocation,
Dennis turned to accountancy and
Albert became a librarian.

Librarian? Somehow one always
thinks of librarians as women, at
least in branch libraries.

My mind went back to my own
boyhood branch library and Miss
Lucinda Swenson. She had always
worn a severe center part and an
authoritarian frown. I had been
perhaps eight and determined upon
my own reading program, but Miss
Swenson had kept trying for
months to shoo me back into the
juvenile section.

Finally I bit her. After that she
let me alone.

I turned to the sheaves of papers
covering the questioning of Dennis
Brannon. There was quite a bit of
material—he had been interrogated
a number of times—but I consoli-
dated.

Dennis Brannon was a rather
small, light-haired man, in his
middle twenties.

"You say you spent the evening
at your brother's house?"

"Yes. I arrived there at about six
o'clock."

"How long did you stay?"

"Until ten-thirty. Then I went
home and found the police waiting
for me."

"You had dinner at your brother's
place?"

"Yes. I stayed there for dinner."

"What did you have to eat?"

Dennis frowned for a moment.
"Roast beef with fried potatoes.
Sliced tomatoes. Canned peaches.
Coffee."

"Your brother is single?"

"Yes."

"Who made the meal?"

"His landlady. Albert rents a
small upper flat. Mrs. Porter—she
lives below—cooks his evening meal
four or five times a week and brings
it up."

"She served it to both of you?"

"No. She had made it earlier and
brought it up. Albert kept it in the
oven until I arrived, and we ate
alone."

"Did Mrs. Porter see you at all?
Arriving, perhaps?"

"I really don't know."

"What did you do after you ate?"

"Albert and I played chess."

"All evening."

"Yes. I'm afraid I won every
game. Albert isn't really a good
player. I suppose that's because he's
not exactly fascinated by the
game."

"He's not interested in chess and
yet he played it for more than three
hours?"

"Yes. Albert is very accom-
modating and I was his guest."

"Have you any idea who might
have wanted to kill your wife?"

"None at all. It must have been a

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prowler or someone of that sort."

"Did you and your wife quarrel?"

"Occasionally. I suppose all married people do."

"What did you quarrel about?"

"Nothing really serious. The usual small things."

"Do you know anybody named Colling? Charles Colling?"

Dennis Brannon shook his head. "The name means nothing to me."

"You saw the bracelet we found next to your wife's body?"

"Yes."

"Do you know anything about it?"

"No. Nothing at all. I never saw it before in my life."

I riffled through another set of papers. Mrs. Porter had been questioned. She had not seen or heard Dennis arrive at his brother's upper flat, but she thought she had heard him leave at about ten-thirty.

I paged through the questioning of Albert Brannon.

"Do you have your brother over for dinner often?"

"Not really. But last night happened to be one of those times. Dennis came over at six. We had dinner and spent the evening playing chess."

"How many games?"

"I can't say exactly. Perhaps half a dozen."

"You won about half of them?"

"No. Dennis won them all. He's quite good at the game."

"You had the radio turned on?"

"No."

"I believe you had lamb chops for dinner?"

"No. Roast beef. Potatoes. Tomatoes. Canned sliced peaches."

"Mashed potatoes?"

"No. Fried."

"How many drinks did Dennis have?"

"He doesn't drink. We had coffee. With cream and sugar."

"Why didn't you invite your brother's wife over too?"

"I used to. However, I'm afraid that I really bore her. So now she prefers to stay home. With a headache, of course."

I heard footsteps and Captain Milliken appeared. "Well, well, still here? The work must be interesting. Your sister phoned me and said you didn't show up for supper. I had to come all the way back to headquarters because I'm the only one who knows where you are or how to reach you."

I glanced at my watch. It was past eight in the evening. I got to my feet and began gathering together the Brannon papers.

Milliken sat down in the swivel chair I'd just vacated. I watched hopefully as he leaned back, but nothing happened.

I sighed and returned the Brannon records to their place in the filing cabinet.

We made our way back to the Records Room where I said good night to Milliken. I lingered behind to ask one of the night crew for a copy of the City Directory.

I found no Dennis Brannon listed, but I did find an Albert Brannon. I was a bit surprised to discover that he still lived at the same address he had in 1941.

I phoned my sister to tell her that I was still alive and well, and then drove to the Albert Brannon address.

It proved to be in a quiet tree-lined residential district. I parked my car and walked up to the porch. I pressed the buzzer connecting the upper flat.

After a few moments the hall leading to the second floor lighted up and a voice called down to inform me that the door was unlocked.

I was met on the top landing by a small man in his middle fifties, with graying hair, but a generally youthful appearance.

"Albert Brannon?"

He nodded.

I hesitated a moment and then pulled out my wallet and showed the badge. "My name is Sergeant Henry H. Buckle."

He looked past my shoulder. "I

thought you detectives worked in pairs?"

I looked back myself. "At the moment I'm on special assignment and haven't got a partner. Could you tell me where I could find your brother?"

He smiled faintly. "You don't know where he is?"

"No."

He invited me in.

I found a pleasant small kitchen and beyond I caught a glimpse of a book-lined room. The rooms melded the odor of books, pipe tobacco, and possibly roast beef.

He filled his pipe at a canister. "Why would you want to know where Dennis is? After all these years?"

"Could you tell me?"

He nodded. "Dennis died in 1944."

"In 1944?"

Albert explained further. "The last of the good wars, you know. He was killed during the invasion of Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. What did you want him for now?"

I felt a bit uncomfortable. "It was about the murder of his wife."

Albert raised an eyebrow. "Don't tell me you've finally solved it?"

"Well . . . yes."

"You *know* who killed her?"

"Yes. Your brother Dennis did."

He waited with interest.

"The way I reconstruct the crime is that your brother discovered his wife had been having an affair with Charles Colling. I imagine he accidentally discovered the bracelet and demanded to know how she got it. He happened to catch her at a moment when she'd had a bit too much vodka, because she not only admitted the affair, but got defiant about it. So Dennis grabbed the nearest kitchen knife and killed her. Then he fled to this place—probably dropping the knife into a convenient sewer on the way—and the two of you cooked up the alibi."

"Really? And what makes you think the alibi wasn't genuine?"

I smiled triumphantly. "There has been considerable liberalization in the practices of the Catholic church since 1941, but at that time no good practicing Catholic—as was Dennis Brannon—would have eaten *meat* on a *Friday*, and such was the day of the murder." Now I smiled tolerantly. "Why didn't you simply tell the police that the two of you ate fish on that evening?"

He joined my smile. "Mrs. Porter had prepared beef roast and brought it up before Dennis showed up so unexpectedly. She was also questioned by the police, you know. If we'd told them that we'd eaten anything but roast beef, they would have realized immediately that something was fishy, if I may use

the word," Albert explained.

"Ah," I said. "You *admit* the fabrication?"

He shrugged. "I suppose so."

I studied him severely. "There's just one thing about this case that I still can't fit into the picture. The *twins* business."

He looked puzzled. "What twins business?"

"Whenever there are twins involved in a murder case, you sort of *expect* some kind of hanky-panky. Like a *switch*."

Albert Brannon blinked. "Why should we switch identities? I don't see any point in that. Besides, most people could tell us apart quite readily. If you don't believe I'm Albert, you could check my fingerprints against my birth records."

"I believe you're Albert," I said. "It's just that it seems almost *mandatory* that. . ." I felt a bit warm. "I mean it's almost *traditional* that whenever twins are involved. . ."

He regarded me with what I uneasily felt was a clinical interest. "Sergeant Buckle, if, thirty years ago, Dennis had been confronted with the fact that he supposedly consumed meat on a Friday, do you *actually* expect that he would have leaped forward with a full confession?"

"Well, no, but. . ."

"Do you think that a *jury* would have condemned a good Catholic to

life in prison simply because he *forgot* the day of the week?"

"But I don't think that he forgot the . . ."

"Perhaps not. But that is what we would have claimed if that slight discrepancy in his alibi had been brought to the attention of the police." Albert smiled in a kindly fashion. "Did you know that Dennis was a war hero?"

"No, but I don't see how that has any . . ."

"Enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor. *Two* Silver Stars, three Purple Hearts, four battle stars. Even a Good Conduct Medal. Would you now, *thirty* years later, sully the reputation of a dead war hero?"

"It isn't a question of sully-ing. . ."

"And what do you expect to do now? Arrest me for being an *accessory* to murder? Isn't there a statute of limitations?"

"Not for murder."

"How about *accessory* to murder?"

"I don't know. I'd have to look that . . ."

"And do you think that *today* a jury would convict me of being an accessory to murder simply because my dead brother war hero forgot to eat fish on a Friday thirty years ago?"

"But you just admitted . . ."

"All of which I would deny to anyone else. It is your word against mine."

I experienced the strong impulse to bite another librarian.

Albert patted my shoulder and spoke quietly. "Sergeant Henry H. Buckle, don't you think it would be wiser to let sleeping dogs lie?"

After several long moments of thoughts, I sighed.

I also went home and had *three* shots of brandy before I went to bed.

I took a thick and dusty cardboard container from the Homicide files and brought it back to the desk.

The year 1862?

Hm, I thought, that could be interesting.

I sat down, leaned back, and . . .

Damn. . . .

